

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

SAB-02 HA-05 SNM-05 DEAE-00 MCT-01 /076 W

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P R 201630Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6969

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

USSOUTHCOM

AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH

AMCONSUL CALI POUCH

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, ECON, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. IN A TELEVISION ADDRESS, PRESIDENT LOPEZ REAFFIRMED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO COLOMBIA'S INTERESTS, AND ADDRESSED ANTICIPATED CHARGES ON U.S. TV OF CORRUPTION INVOLVING GOC OFFICIALS. THE NATIONAL POPULAR ALLIANCE (ANAPO) ANNOUNCED ITS SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATIVE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BELISARIO BETANCUR. PRESIDENT LOPEZ ADMINISTERED A PUBLIC REBUKE TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL IN A DISPUTE INVOLVING PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER, ACCUSED OF MALFEASANCE. UTILITY RATE INCREASES WERE RESCINDED IN NARINO DEPARTMENT AS A RESULT OF VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. LOPEZ CONFIRMS IMPORTANCE OF PANAMA CANAL TREATIES TO COLOMBIA. IN A TELEVISED INTERVIEW ON MARCH 16, FOCUSSED ON THE PANAMA CANAL AND DRUG TRAFFICKING (SEE BELOW), PRESIDENT LOPEZ REITERATED SOME OF HIS THOUGHTS, EXPRESSED THE NIGHT BEFORE TO THE AMBASSADOR, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CANAL TREATIES, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO COLOMBIAN RIGHTS AND INTERESTS IN THE WATERWAY (BOGOTA 2547). LOPEZ NOTED COLOMBIA'S ROLE IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE TREATIES AND WAS PLEASED THAT SEVERAL VISITS BY MEMBERS OF THE U.S. CONGRESS HAD RESULTED IN A FAVORABLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COLOMBIAN EXECUTIVE AND THE U.S. LEGISLATURE - A RELATIONSHIP WHICH HE HOPED WOULD FACILITATE U.S. RATIFICATION

OF THE QUITA SUENO TREATY. LOCAL PRESS REACTION TO U.S. SENATE TREATY APPROVAL HAS BEEN FAVORABLE BUT MODERATE IN COVERAGE.

3. LOPEZ SPEAKS ON NARCOTICS TRAFFIC. PRESIDENT LOPEZ IN HIS TELEVISION INTERVIEW ALSO PREPARED THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC FOR ALLEGATIONS OF OFFICIAL COSSUPTION IN CONNECTION WITH THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC THAT MIGHT BE AIRED ON THE CBS TV "SIXTY MINUTES" BROADCAST. LOPEZ NOTED THE CONTINUING INTERCHANGE OF NARCOTICS INTELLIGENCE BETWEEN THE USG AND GOC. LOPEZ DEFENDED THE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND LABOR AND THE NEPHEW OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE TURBAY.

4. ANAPO TO SUPPORT BETANCUR. THE NATIONAL POPULAR ALLIANCE (ANAPO) DECIDED AT A NATIONAL CONVENTION OF MARCH 11 TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF CONSERVATIVE BELISARIO BETANCUR. THE ANAPO, FOUNDED BY THE LATE DICTATOR AND PRESIDENT ROJAS PINILLA, WAS ONCE A POWERFUL FORCE; ACCORDING TO MANY OBSERVERS IT ACTUALLY POLLED MORE VOTES IN 1970 THAN THE OFFICIAL WINNER, MISAEL PASTRANA. THEREAFTER, ANAPO RAPIDLY DECLINED, POLLING AROUND 500,000 VOTES IN 1974 BEHIND THE CANDIDACY OF ROJAS' DAUGHTER, MARIA EUGENIA, WHO RAN A POOR THIRD TO THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATES. SOME ANAPO LEADERS HAVE SINCE DEFECTED TO LEFTIST PARTIES. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR ON MARCH 16, BETANCUR SAID THAT ANAPO WOULD SUPPLY HIM WITH 150-200,000 VOTES, WHICH HE BELIEVED MIGHT BE ENOUGH TO EDGE OUT THE LIBERAL CANDIDATE, TULIO CESAR TURBAY. THIS IS A FAR CRY FROM THE WILDLY OPTIMISTIC ESTIMATE OF 2 MILLION ANAPO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VOTES BY SOME CONSERVATIVES, WHO PERHAPS HOPE THAT A COMBINATION OF BETANCUR'S POPULIST IMAGE AND THE ANAPO ENDORSEMENT WILL SOMEHOW ATTRACT ANAPO'S FORMER SUPPORTERS AS WELL AS MANY COLOMBIANS WHO NORMALLY DO NOT VOTE.

5. PRESIDENT LOPEZ REBUKES THE ATTORNEYGENERAL. IN RESPONSE TO CLAIMS OF INNOCENCE BY PUBLIC WORKD MINISTER HUMBERTO SALCEDO, ATTORNEY GENERAL (AG) SERRANO STATED IN A LETTER TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ THAT SALCEDO HAD MADE FALSE STATEMENTS ON TELEVISION TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION. THE AG ALSO OBJECTED TO THIS USE OF THE GOVERNMENT TV CHANNEL. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, IN RETURN, ADMINISTERED A PUBLIC REBUKE TO THE AG FOR HIS MANNER OF PROCEEDING AGAINST THE MINISTER, A MOVE CRITICIEZED BY EVEN NORMALLY PRO-LOPEZ PRESS ORGANS. ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN SOME SPECULATION THAT THE AG MIGHT RESIGN, HE WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN OFFICE UNTIL SEPTEMBER, THE NORMAL EXPIRATION OF HIS TERM. THE AG IS CONSIDERED TO BE HONEST AND HAS BEEN COOPERATIVE IN JOINT EFFORTS WITH THE U.S. INTERDICT THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC.

6. PUBLIC ORDER. PROTEST OVER UTILITY RATE INCREASES IN THE TOWNS OF SUCRE AND TUQUERRES IN NARINO DEPARTMENT LED TO VIOLENT STREET DEMONSTRATIONS, INJURIES TO BOTH POLICE OFFICIALS AND

DEMONSTRATORS, AND A MODERATE AMOUNT OF PROPERTY DAMAGE. ARMY
TROOPS RESTORED ORDER IN BOTH TOWNS, BUT ONLY AFTER AUTHORITIES
INDICATED THEY WOULD ROLL BACK THE RATE INCREASES. IN BOGOTA,
A BANK WAS ROBBED AT MID-DAY BY A GROUP IDENTIFYING ITSELF AS
THE "POPULAR LIBERATION ARMY" (EPL), A PEKING-ORIENTED
TERRORIST GROUP RESPONSIBLE FOR SEVERAL RECENT ROBBERIES.
SECURITY FORCES IN VALLE DEPARTMENT RESCUED A CHILD KIDNAPPED
IN MARCH IN AN OPERATION IN WHICH FIVE OF THE KIDNAPPERS WERE
KILLED AND FIVE OTHERS ARRESTED.
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